

THE

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

*Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi*

FEBRUARY 1998

## FEBRUARY HAPPENINGS

The February luncheon meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at noon on Thursday, February 19 at the Kate Lobrano House, 108 Cue Street, Bay Saint Louis.

Our speaker will be Mary Ott Davidson, the sculptor who is creating the Bienville Tercentenary statue for the park in Bay Saint Louis. This is a great opportunity to learn how a huge bronze statue is conceived, designed, sculpted and cast.

Mrs. Davidson has completed her statue of Bienville's brother, d'Iberville, and like a vigilant parent, she delivered it to the foundry in New York herself. Bienville is only a head at the moment but soon will join his life-size body and he too will travel to New York for casting.

The statues will overlook the Mississippi Sound from Biloxi beach and the Bay of Saint Louis respectively.

Please call 467-4090 for luncheon reservations at \$6.00. Call early to assure your reservation and to help us plan our seating.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Generosity is a predominant characteristic of our members. No sooner was there a large vacant space in the Lobrano House where the dining room table had been (it was on loan and returned at its owner's request) than Melinda and Jack Richard arrived with a Sheriden replacement. Thank you, Melinda and Jack.

It would not be amiss to mention here that we do accept items "on loan" that will be returned on request.

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W. C. C. Claiborne, judge and statesman, served as Governor of the Mississippi Territory, of the Louisiana Territory and two terms as Governor of Louisiana.

He was the first of the three Claibornes distinguished in the history of this region.

## THE CLAIBORNES

Three Claibornes, renowned in Louisiana and Mississippi history, descended from the first William Claiborne who landed at Jamestown in 1621 to serve as surveyor of the plantation of Virginia for the London Company. Subsequent Claibornes were staunch supporters of the American Revolution, reducing the family to poverty in support of the Cause.

The heirs to the family name, if not fortune, earned scorn as well as accolades during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Following are brief summaries of the careers of the three most notable members:

## WILLIAM CHARLES COLE CLAIBORNE (1775-1819)

Upon leaving William and Mary College, William, at age 15, made his way to New York, then the seat of national government where he secured a job copying bills and resolutions for members of Congress. While there Thomas Jefferson gave him access to his excellent library and John Sevier urged him to study law and go to Tennessee.

William was admitted to the bar after only three months' intensive study. He journeyed to Sullivan



County, Tennessee, where within two years he had no rival as an advocate at the criminal bar. On the formation of Tennessee as a state, Governor John Sevier appointed him judge of the Supreme Court of Law and Equity. He was just 22 years old.

It was this brilliant young man that President Thomas Jefferson appointed Governor of the Mississippi Territory in 1801 to succeed Winthrop Sargent.

One of the most important acts of the Claiborne administration was the collection, for the federal government, of data relative to Mississippi land titles, then in a chaotic condition. His report to Secretary Madison was the foundation on which Congress based future measures for the settlement of land titles.

After the Louisiana Purchase, the young statesman was made governor of the Territory of Orleans, a post he held until Louisiana was admitted to the union in 1812, after which he served two terms as elected Governor of Louisiana.

William died at age 42 on the threshold of a promising national career. But for 17 years, he was one of the most important men in public service in what was then the great Southwest Frontier. He was a champion of Jeffersonian liberalism and spokesman for Western democracy.

#### **FERDINAND LEIGH CLAIBORNE (1771 - 1815)**

Brother of W.C.C. Claiborne, Ferdinand served as commander of the militia of the Mississippi Territory. He won renown as an officer under General Mad Anthony Wayne. He resigned from the army in 1802 and went to Natchez during his brother's administration as governor of the Territory. There he became a merchant and married the daughter of Colonel Anthony Hutchins, the English Tory who was one of the leaders in the abortive 1781 revolt against Spanish rule at Natchez.

He resumed his active military

career in 1811 when, upon the recommendation of Governor Holmes, he was commissioned brigadier-general of the militia of the Mississippi Territory. Two years later he was commissioned brigadier-general of volunteers in the U.S. service. He organized a brigade of Louisiana and Mississippi volunteers and was ordered to Fort Stoddert where he arrived July 30, 1813 to guard the frontier against the Creek Indians.

A month later a massacre at Fort Mims occurred during which more than 500 of its occupants were scalped and mutilated after a front gate had been banked with sand and could not be closed, and an Indian attack came. Brigadier-General Claiborne, because of his overall responsibility for the safety of the frontier, was severely criticized for this disaster.

Two years later, his wealth dissipated in public service (he personally paid for transportation, food and care of his men), broken in health by exposure, and in spirit because of the criticism of those who could not forget the carelessness at Fort Mims, for which one of his officers, Major Daniel Beasley was actually to blame.

General Claiborne died at age 44 in 1815. One of the last dramatic acts of his life, which cost about his last dollar, was to brilliantly illuminate his home and grounds in celebration when news reached Natchez of the victory of Jackson's army at the Battle of New Orleans.

#### **JOHN FRANCIS HAMTRAMACK CLAIBORNE (1807 - 1884)**

The son of Ferdinand, J.F.H. Claiborne was known as "the Confederate Yankee" for his support of the Confederacy even as he aided the Union during the Civil War.

After General Claiborne's death, John was sent to Virginia to be educated. He planned to remain in Virginia, but because of his delicate health, he returned to Natchez where he took over the newspaper then published by Andrew Marschalk, Mississippi's first printer.

Before he was 21 John was the Democratic candidate of Adams County for the Legislature, to which he was elected for three consecutive terms. He was nominated for Congress in 1835 by the first Democratic

State Convention in Mississippi, was elected by a large majority and arrived as the youngest member of Congress.

He was respected by some and reviled by others when he was appointed president of the Board of Choctaw Commissioners to adjudicate claims of the Indians under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, which were the basis of much corrupt speculation which Claiborne exposed, treading on the toes of interests so influential that they could employ S.S. Prentiss on a contingency fee of \$100,000 to defend them. Claiborne's life was repeatedly threatened and he was twice challenged to duels which he refused to accept. His unwavering action crushed the speculation and ruined those involved. However, Claiborne found it the better part of valor to leave the unfriendly atmosphere of Mississippi and take refuge in New Orleans.

There he traded in land, cotton and slaves, but being a novice in business, lost his money and was taken into custody like a common debtor. Later he went back to newspaper editing, but the collapse of his poor health led him to consider buying the Laurelwood Plantation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. (See accompanying story.) Despite little experience in plantation management, Claiborne made a success of growing sea island cotton.

With the onset of the Civil War, Claiborne remained secluded at Laurelwood as long as he could to avoid taking sides. Although a government employee, it could be assumed that he would be loyal to the South, especially as he owned 100 slaves. Still, even though he decided to openly support the Confederacy (He was commissioned to administer oaths and handle deeds and other papers for the Confederacy and during the war bought thousands of dollars of Confederate bonds.) he also decided to secretly serve the Union.

Claiborne's intrigue during the war was known to the Confederacy, but in the absence of absolute proof of traffic with the enemy, it was unable



# TERCENTENARY CELEBRATION

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### PURCHASE OF ONE BRICK

This is an order of purchase for one standard size brick at the fair price of \$50.00 which will be inscribed as directed below and will be integrated into the overall design surrounding a life-size bronze statue of Jean Pierre LeMoynes, Sieur de Bienville. All engraved bricks will be in easy-to-read locations. The statue with its commemorative and memorial brick and granite surrounds will be permanently installed in the park next to Hancock Bank on South Beach Boulevard in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. Unveiling of the statue and park will take place on the Feast Day of Saint Louis, the 25th of August, 1999.

Each brick may have up to three (3) lines and each line may contain up to fourteen (14) characters (including spaces).

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## VISIT MEXICO AND CRUISE THE PANAMA CANAL

On October 21, 1998 the group will fly to Mexico City to begin a 13 night holiday cruise which includes 2 nights in Mexico City, 1 night in Taxco; boarding the Sun Princess in Acapulco with stops in Costa Rica, Columbia, Aruba and St. Thomas, through the Panama Canal and ending in San Juan Puerto Rico.

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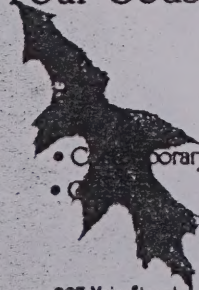


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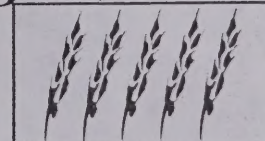
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